



PRESS RELEASE

ERC & ZESN Deploy Observers for 2022 Voter Registration Blitz and Provides Analysis of Phase 1 List of Registration Centres

Introduction

As part of their commitment to support democratic development and promote credible, transparent, and accountable electoral processes in Zimbabwe, the Election Resource Centre (ERC) and Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) are observing the voter registration blitz on an independent and nonpartisan basis for all Zimbabweans. The joint observation effort will provide citizens and key stakeholders with accurate, timely, and credible information on the voter registration blitz.

ERC/ZESN Methodology

In order to gather factual and verifiable information on the conduct of the 2022 voter registration blitz, ERC and ZESN deployed one volunteer per constituency who will observe periodically throughout the entire voter registration process and provide weekly reports on the political environment. These individuals were carefully recruited from local communities following a strict criterion and adhering to gender balance. These observers underwent a thorough training program on the conduct of the voter registration process, direction on what to observe, and when to report during the voter registration period. Additionally, while at the training observers signed a code of conduct acknowledging that they were non-partisan. ZESN and ERC will release periodic reports on the inclusivity, transparency and accountability of the voter registration blitz.

Timeline of Voter Registration Blitz

In late October 2021, the ZEC initially announced that it planned to conduct a voter registration blitz beginning in early December. The ZEC later detailed that the voter registration blitz would occur simultaneously across all 210 constituencies in two phases, with the first beginning on the 6th of December 2021 concluding on 20 December 2021 and the second phase starting on 28 December 2021 concluding on the 1st of February 2022. Approximately two weeks prior to the scheduled start of Phase 1 the ZEC postponed the entire voter registration blitz to early February 2022. The reason the ZEC gave for the delay was to provide additional time for Zimbabweans to obtain national ID cards which is a key requirement for one to register. The ZEC did not provide the new dates of the voter registration blitz until the 13th of January 2022 and it was at this time when the ZEC announced that the voter registration blitz was to begin on 1 February- 28 February 2022 with the second phase starting 11 April- 30 April 2022. The lack of sufficient notice and uncertainty of the timeline create confusion amongst individuals who wish to register or update their registration details. This also makes it difficult for other stakeholders, including political parties, civil society and observers to adequately prepare to engage in the process.

Issues with Accreditation

While ERC and ZESN appreciate the accreditation extended to their observers by the ZEC, there were a number of administrative challenges that affected the timely deployment of ERC and ZESN's observers. In past processes, ZEC conducted accreditation at all the provincial centres. However, ZEC without advanced notification only accredited observers in two provincial centres, Bulawayo and Harare, requiring last minute changes to ERC and ZESN's training plans, since the observers from all provinces had to travel to either of the centres, this had significant financial implications. Further, the Accreditation Committee did not meet as announced in advance of Phase 1 of the voter registration blitz. Instead, the Committee only met on Monday 31st of January 2022 with accreditation at the Harare Accreditation Centre starting on the 1st of February and accreditation at the Bulawayo Accreditation Centre starting on the 3rd of February 2022 (Phase 1 started 1st February). As a result of the administrative decisions, it was not possible for ERC and ZESN to deploy observers in the first week of Phase 1 of the voter registration blitz as planned. These administrative challenges undermined the civic society oversight of the blitz.

Initial Analysis of the Distribution Voter Registration Centres

On 25 January 2022, the ZEC released a List of Voter Registration Centres for Phase 1 of the Voter Registration Blitz. As part of its overall observation effort of the voter registration blitz, ERC and ZESN analysed the distribution of voter registration centres. For the voter registration process to be inclusive it must afford all eligible individuals relatively equal access to register for the first time or update their registration details. The distribution of voter registration centres can have a profound impact on access to the process and hence its inclusiveness and credibility. In practice, this means there should be relatively more registration centres in rural areas than urban areas due to lower population densities. At the same time, registration centres in urban areas, being more densely populated, should generally be open for more days than those in rural areas. Further, the distribution of voter registration centres should take into account geographic variations in the voting age population (VAP). While the current blitz is an update of the existing voters list, and only unregistered individuals or those needing to update their details need to register, VAP is still a good indicator of relative demand for voter registration. In general, areas with relatively higher VAP should have more total days of voter registration than areas with relatively lower VAP for individuals to have equal access to the process. In practice, while urban areas should have a higher VAP per registration centre, the VAP per day of voter registration should be relatively uniform across the country.

Overall, for Phase 1 of the voter registration blitz, ERC and ZESN's analysis shows:

1. The list is missing registration centres for four constituencies Mutoko East, Mutoko South and Uzumba (in Mashonaland East) as well as Chirumanzu (Midlands).
2. There are more registration centres in rural areas reflecting lower population densities (2,132 vs 582 registration centres).
3. Urban registration centres are scheduled to be open more days than rural ones (2.7 vs 2.1 days) reflecting higher population density.
4. However, urban registration centres are open for an insufficient number of days compared to rural registration centres to provide individuals in urban areas an equal opportunity to register to vote. The VAP per day for urban areas is 1,571 compared to 942 for rural areas. This means that urban centres will have to process 70% more individuals than rural centres to have comparable registration rates.
5. There are 14 constituencies with high VAP per day (over 2,000) that require additional days of voter registration to provide individuals an equal opportunity to register.

Please refer to *Annex 1: Initial Analysis of the Distribution Voter Registration Centres* for additional information on the distribution of registration centres.

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Annex 1: Initial Analysis of the Distribution Voter Registration Centres

Phase 1 List of Registration Centres Statistics

The Phase 1 list of voter registration centres has a total of 2,714 locations where voter registration will take place with centres in all ten provinces; in 206 of 210 constituencies and 1,316 of 1,956 wards (67%). As anticipated, the majority of registration centres are in rural areas with 2,132 (78.6%) in rural areas and 582 (21.4%) in urban areas. However, no registration centres were listed for four constituencies: Mutoko East, Mutoko South and Uzumba (all in Mashonaland East) as well as Chirumanzu (Midlands). Further, only two centres are listed for Luveve (Bulawayo) - far fewer than any other constituency. These omissions may be simple mistakes and ERC and ZESN call upon the ZEC to clarify the Phase 1 list of registration centres for these five constituencies.

During Phase 1, voter registration is scheduled to take place over a total of 5,991 days¹ with the average centre open for 2.2 days. 635 centres are scheduled to be open one day, 1,301 open two days, 536 open 3 days, 155 open 4 days and 86 centres open 5 days or more (including Mbuyanehandu Hall in Marondera open 13 days and Town House in Harare open 28 days). Again, as expected, registration centres in urban areas are on average open for longer (2.7 days) than those in rural areas (2.1 days).

Table 1: Voter Registration (VR) Centres and Total Days of VR by Rural/Urban and Province				
Rural/Urban and Province	VR Centres	Percent VR Centres	Total Days of VR	Days per VR Centre
Rural	2,132	78.6%	4,405	2.1
Urban	582	21.4%	1,586	2.7
Total	2,714	100.0%	5,991	2.2
Bulawayo	152	5.6%	318	2.1
Harare	273	10.1%	895	3.3
Manicaland	265	9.8%	755	2.8
Mashonaland Central	291	10.7%	538	1.8
Mashonaland East	303	11.2%	589	1.9
Mashonaland West	325	12.0%	629	1.9
Masvingo	368	13.6%	746	2.0
Matabeleland North	159	5.9%	365	2.3
Matabeleland South	224	8.3%	367	1.6
Midlands	354	13.0%	789	2.2
Total	2,714	100.0%	5,991	2.2

Phase 1 of the voter registration blitz is scheduled to relatively equally include municipalities and rural district councils (RDCs). Voter registration is scheduled to take place in 72% of wards

¹ Days of voter registration is the sum of the number of voter registration centres times the number of days each centre is scheduled to be open.

in municipalities and 69.6% of wards in RDCs during Phase 1. However, during Phase 1, voter registration is scheduled to take place in only 25.8% of wards in local boards and town councils.

Table 2: Wards with Voter Registration (VR) by Local Authority Type and Province			
Local Authority Type and Province	All Wards	Wards with Phase 1 VR	Percent Wards with Phase 1 VR
Municipalities	268	193	72.0%
Local Boards and Town Councils	120	31	25.8%
Rural District Councils (RDCs)	1,568	1,092	69.6%
Total	1,956	1,316	67.3%
Bulawayo	29	26	89.7%
Harare	78	67	85.9%
Manicaland	260	152	58.5%
Mashonaland Central	232	149	64.2%
Mashonaland East	229	127	55.5%
Mashonaland West	231	150	64.9%
Masvingo	242	179	74.0%
Matabeleland North	193	119	61.7%
Matabeleland South	168	119	70.8%
Midlands	296	228	77.0%
Total	1,958	1,316	67.3%

Voting Age Population (VAP) Analysis

VAP² per day of voter registration³ is a measure of the equality of opportunity to register. It measures the relative number of individuals that will likely need to either newly register or update their registration details per day. Even though this voter registration blitz is an update, as VAP increases the number of individuals who need to newly register or update their registration details are likely to increase. VAP per day of voter registration should be relatively uniform across rural and urban areas as it takes into account both the number of voter registration centres (which are higher in rural areas) and the number of days each centre is open (which is higher in urban areas). A relatively high VAP per day means that relatively more people are likely to be new registrants or update their registration details than in areas with relatively low VAP per day. Therefore, significant variations in VAP per day produces inequities in access to the voter registration process thereby undermining inclusiveness and credibility.

² VAP figures were estimated from Zimstats official 2020 publications with population estimates for 2022 by district for nine of ten provinces while VAP estimates for Bulawayo are from Zimstats publication “Population Projections Thematic Report 2015” (see <https://www.zimstat.co.zw/population/population-2/>).

³ VAP per day of voter registration equals the voting age population for an area divided by days of voter registration for that area (which, as noted, is the sum of the number of voter registration centres times the number of days each centre is scheduled to be open).

As with past voter registration exercises, the list of voter registration centres for Phase 1 raises concern that there are insufficient total days of voter registration in urban areas in general and, in particular, in Harare and to a lesser extent Bulawayo. The VAP per day for rural areas is 942 compared to 1,571 for urban areas. Therefore, urban registration centres need to process 70% more individuals than rural centres for equal levels of voter registration. Similarly, Harare has a VAP per day of 1,873 compared to an average of 1,109 and thus registration centres in Harare need to process 70% more individuals than the average registration centre. Bulawayo has a VAP of 1,362 meaning Bulawayo centres will need to process 22% more individuals than the average registration centre. Thus, while registration centres are open for more days in urban areas than rural areas, they open for an insufficient number of days to give people in urban areas (especially in Harare) an equal opportunity to register to vote or update their registration details.

Table 3: Voting Age Population (VAP) per Day of Voter Registration (VR) by Rural/Urban and Province					
Rural/Urban and Province	VR Centres	Total Days of VR	Estimated VAP⁴	VAP per VR Centre	VAP per Day of VR
Rural	2,132	4,405	4,150,476	1,947	942
Urban	582	1,586	2,491,569	4,281	1,571
Total	2,714	5,991	6,642,045	2,447	1,109
Bulawayo	152	318	433,223	2,850	1,362
Harare	273	895	1,675,906	6,139	1,873
Manicaland	265	755	630,913	2,381	836
Mashonaland Central	291	538	517,514	1,778	962
Mashonaland East	303	589	519,336	1,714	882
Mashonaland West	325	629	738,123	2,271	1,173
Masvingo	368	746	689,631	1,874	924
Matabeleland North	159	365	288,228	1,813	790
Matabeleland South	224	367	281,019	1,255	766
Midlands	354	789	868,152	2,452	1,100
Total	2714	5991	6,642,045	2,447	1,109

Of particular concern are 13 constituencies with a very high VAP per day of voter registration (over 2,000 compared to an average of 1,109). In all these constituencies registration centres will need to process at least 80% more individuals per day than the average registration centre to have equal levels of voter registration. Luvuvu has the highest VAP per Day of VR of 10,499, however, it is likely that this is because not all of the constituency's centres open during Phase

⁴ The total estimated VAP for 2022 is approximately 8.9 million for the entire country. The total estimated VAP for the 1,316 wards with voter registration during Phase 1 is approximately 6.6 million.

1 were included in the ZEC list. Given the high VAP per day of voter registration, individuals in these constituencies have less opportunity to register. Additional days of registration at centres in these constituencies would help address this issue.

Table 4: Constituencies with Very High Voting Age Population (VAP) per Day of Voter Registration (VR)							
Constituency (Province)	Wards	Wards with VR	VR Centres	Total Days of VR	VAP	VAP per VR Centre	VAP per Day of VR
Luveve (Bulawayo)	3	3	4	5	52,497	13,124	10,499
Epworth (Harare)	7	7	12	28	162,777	13,565	5,813
Budiriro (Harare)	2	2	12	28	91,896	7,658	3,282
Hatfield (Harare)	2	2	9	28	86,521	9,613	3,090
Harare West (Harare)	2	2	10	28	84,699	8,470	3,025
Harare South (Harare)	1	1	11	56	158,225	14,384	2,825
Masvingo Urban (Masvingo)	10	7	10	23	60,382	6,038	2,625
Warren Park (Harare)	2	2	13	28	71,814	5,524	2,565
Kuwadzana (Harare)	3	3	10	28	68,765	6,876	2,456
Harare East (Harare)	3	3	13	28	66,936	5,149	2,391
Harare North (Harare)	2	2	12	28	61,882	5,157	2,210
Chitungwiza South (Harare)	4	4	9	31	64,968	7,219	2,096
Zvimba East (Mash West)	5	5	14	28	58,209	4,158	2,079
Chiredzi North (Masvingo)	11	8	10	30	60,507	6,051	2,017